DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 767 CS 009 373

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TITLE The Lively Art of Reading Aloud to Children.
PUB DATE 4 Nov 88
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Tennessee State Council of the International Reading Association (Chattanooga, TN, November 4, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Language Arts; *Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Instruction; Story Reading; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Reading Uses

ABSTRACT

Reading aloud is an essential part of the classroom instructional program, along with direct instruction and sustained silent reading or book contact, and should not be slighted despite the numerous time demands from other sources. Reading aloud to children provides opportunities for introducing children to good literature and encourages language development. Selecting good materials is of vital importance. In addition, strong oral reading includes: (1) an effective lead-in; (2) eye contact; (3) adequate volume and clear enunciation; (4) logical phrasing; (5) a sense of drama; and (6) enthusiasm. (MM)

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TIRA 4 November, 1988

THE LIVELY ART OF READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN

Reading aloud to children provides opportunities for introducing children to good literature and encourages language development. Further, reading aloud demonstrates that wonderful experiences can come from books. Through hearing stories and even factual information from books, children can substantially increase awareness of the world around them. Further, reading to children enhances their vocabularies. This is particularly true for children from homes where experiential background in language is limited. However, the most important reason for reading aloud to children, as Durkin (1984) suggested, is for enjoyment.

The desire to read to children is not only noble, but should be considered an important part of the language arts instructional program. Reading aloud is not a frill but, for the reasons cited above and many others related to particular circumstances, is the third leg on the tripod that is the reading program: 1. direct instruction, 2. sustained silent reading or book contact and 3. reading aloud.

EFFECTIVE ORAL READING STRATEGIES

Material.

Selecting good material is of vital importance. There are many human sources including teachers, librarians, and virtually anyone who likes to read or enjoyed being read to as a child. Published resources are also numerous; among them are those provided by Trelease (1985), Myers-White

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(1988), and Reed (1988). Many excellent resources can be uncovered by reading periodicals that carry reviews and simply by asking people with varying interests.

Eye Contact.

Eye contact ("I" contact) is essential for good oral reading. It tells the listener that he or she is valued and invited into the story. Eye contact does not mean a cursory glance over the group but direct and individual contact with each listener. Eye contact provides the reader with opportunities to estimate level of interest and comprehension among listeners. Further, eye contact helps considerably in overcoming unavoidable distraction by involving listeners more intensely in the story. Good eye contact is facilitated through slower reading and a adequate knowledge of text.

Lead-in.

The lead-in is very important. This is the time to set the scene and generate interest in the content. How much introduction is needed depends on the experiential background of the listeners relative to the setting of the story. Props and wall maps can be helpful. For example, before reading Owls in the Family (Mowat, 1961) it would be valuable to locate Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and briefly describe the area for the listeners. The lead-in is also the time to provide direct instruction for understanding difficult concepts and vocabulary. Few middle school students, for example, would have adequate knowledge to comprehend the vocabulary and concepts relative to bull-fighting presented in Shadow of a Bull (Woiciechowska, 1964). Consequently, preparation is essential before undertaking this story and clarification must continue as new terminology relative to bull-fighting appears. The reader is directly encouraging learning about the phenomenon of bull-fighting, geography,

mores of Spain, and vocabulary while experiencing the joy of a beautiful story of emerging courage and maturity. The main purpose of the lead-in, whether for a book or story as a whole or for a particular day's reading, is to get the children off to a good start.

Volume

Adequate volume is essential but many readers tend to speak too softly. The reader must try to assure that the furthest away (or least capable) listener can hear without straining. Clear enunciation is vital; listening to recordings of read aloud sessions can be very helpful. The reader needs to assess the listening environment for distractions such as outside noise, fans, and various types of organizational noise. Taped readings can be very useful for evaluation of volume, enunication, and, as explored in detail below, phrasing.

Phrasing

Appropriate phrasing is essential for carrying the drama of the story. Reading aloud is a performing art, theater, as well as simply a means of telling a story. The reader must bring from within an adequate level of energy and enthusiasm. Varying pitch, volume and speed are effective ways to enhance interest. Successful phrasing involves telling the story in logical thought units; this requires thoughtful pre-reading. This also prepares the reader for encounters with potential hazards such as unusual sentence structure and undesignated speakers.

The reader might occasionally alter the text to encourage comprehension among the listeners. Rapid dialogue is frequently presented without designating the speaker. Unless the reader is a master at character voices, it can be helpful to insert speaker designations. For example, at the very beginning of How to Eat Fried Worms (Rockwell,

1973) there are three characters conversing rapidly but the author did not include speaker designations. The oral reader can encourage comprehension in the listeners simply by indicating who is speaking. Another helpful modification of text is to have characters address each other by name. Note the original text presented below from Bunnicula (How and Howe, 1979):

"I can tell you one thing," Chester said, "I got a good look at the tomato. There were very suspicious marks on the skin."

"So?"

"I believe they're teeth marks."

"So?"

"So tonight I'm going to reread a book I read last year." (pg. 36)

This text can be modified for clarity without changing the intregity of the story. Additions to the text are underlined:

"I can tell you one thing," Chester said, "I got a good look at the tomato. There were very suspicious marks on the skin, Harold."

"So? Chester. So what?"

Harold, I believe they're teeth marks."

"So?"

So tonight, Harold, I'm going to reread a book I read last year."

Be Prepared

The reader needs to be aware of what's coming in the text. This, of course, is more true of books written for middle grade and secondary level students. Readers need to be prepared for situations that make them uncomfortable or might be difficult for the audience to deal with constructively. The bottom line is to deal sensitively with personal feelings and this might be difficult to do if caught off guard.

Summary

Reading aloud is an essential part of the instructional program and must not be slighted despite many time demands from other sources. Strong oral reading includes: 1). an effective lead-in, 2). eye contact, 3) adequate volume and clear enunciation, 4). logical phrasing, 5) a sense of drama and 6). enthusiasm. Effective oral reading requires skill and artistic competence but must be learned like any other significant capability. Rewards are tremendous and provide a joyful experience for both reader and listeners.

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